

**Press Statement by Dr Arata Kochi  
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\*\*\* Check against delivery \*\*\*

**WHO Malaria Head to Environmentalists:  
“Help save African babies as you are helping  
to save the environment.”**

I am here today with one urgent message to everyone who cares about the environment. Your concern, your activism, your heroics have helped – and continue to help – protect the earth's wildlife and nature.

I am here today to ask you, please: Help save African babies as you are helping to save the environment.

African babies do not have a powerful movement like the environmental movement to champion their well-being. They need your help.

Nearly one year ago, I was asked to take charge of the World Health Organization's Global Malaria Programme. I knew the job would be a challenge. Little progress was being made in controlling malaria, even though WHO had declared – way back in 1998 – that rolling back malaria would be one of its greatest priorities.

I asked my staff; I asked malaria experts around the world: “Are we using every possible weapon to fight this disease?” It became apparent that we were not. One powerful weapon against malaria was not being deployed. In a battle to save the lives of nearly one million children every year – most of them in Africa – the world was reluctant to spray the inside of houses and huts with insecticides; especially with a highly effective insecticide known as *dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane*, or “DDT.”

Even though indoor spraying with DDT and other insecticides had been remarkably effective preventing malaria sickness and death where used, this strategy seemed to have been abandoned by most countries nearly 30 years ago. By the early 1980s, WHO was no longer actively promoting it.

Some people told me that there was a good reason why its wide scale use had been phased out. I was told the practice was unsafe for humans, birds, fish and wildlife; that the use of DDT in the United States in the 1950s had led to the near extinction of the bald eagle. I was told that indoor spraying with DDT was "politically unpopular."

But I believe that public health policies must be based on the science and the data, not on conventional wisdom or politics. As we examined the issue, we found that the scientific and programmatic evidence told a different story: We found that:

- One of the best tools we have against malaria is indoor residual house spraying, as it has proven to be just as cost effective as other malaria prevention measures.
- Of the dozen insecticides WHO has approved as safe for house spraying, the most effective is DDT.
- DDT presents no health risk when used properly indoors. Well-managed indoor spraying programmes using DDT pose no harm to wildlife or to humans.

That is why today, after this reevaluation, the World Health Organization is announcing that indoor residual spraying with DDT and other insecticides will again play a major role in its efforts to fight the disease.

WHO is now recommending the use of indoor spraying not only in epidemic areas but also in areas with constant and high malaria transmission, including throughout Africa.

WHO is calling on all malaria control programmes around the world to develop and issue a clear statement outlining their position on indoor spraying with long lasting insecticides such as DDT, specifying where and how it will be implemented in accordance with WHO guidelines, and how these programmes will provide all possible support to accelerate and manage this intervention effectively.

WHO *will* use every possible and safe method to control malaria.

Help save African babies as you are helping to save the environment. Help us advocate for careful limited use of indoor spraying. Help us set up the appropriate and proper management systems so that DDT is used effectively. And finally, help us raise the necessary funds to research and develop even more effective and affordable interventions.